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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

290th meeting

Friday, 25 November 2005, 11 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and great pleasure to warmly welcome Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations; and Mr. Andrey Denisov, President of the Security Council. I should especially like to acknowledge the presence among us of, and respectfully welcome, Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority. I also wish to thank Mr. Mohd. Radzi Abdul Rahman, Alternate Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, who is representing the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, as well as Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I thank them both for their presence at this ceremony.

I also wish convey the Committee's great appreciation to the representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations and all those who so readily accepted the Committee's invitation. Your presence in such number honours the Committee and, above all, illustrates your commitment to the promotion and attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

I now invite all participants to rise to observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and the return of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Allow me now to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

A sense of shared responsibility vis-à-vis the issue of Palestine has brought us together today, on 29 November, as it does every year, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Participants have come in great numbers to this meeting in response to the invitation extended by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, thereby rallying around the just cause of a people who have for long and through great sacrifice sought to attain their right to self-determination, independence and national sovereignty. I thank every one here for their presence, which attests to their commitment to peace and reconciliation in both Palestine and the Middle East region, which is cherished by humankind as a whole.

This year's observance of the National Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincides with the thirtieth anniversary of the General Assembly's

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adoption of resolution 3376 (XXX), of 10 November 1975, which established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. That anniversary is not a cause for celebration, but rather an opportunity for the Committee to reflect upon the many years of effort during which the international community and the parties concerned have found themselves powerless in the face of the numerous obstacles on the road to finding a negotiated, comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Our meeting today provides us an opportunity once again to express our unwavering commitment to move ahead with resolve towards an equitable solution to the question of Palestine.

This Day of Solidarity also reminds us that there will be no definitive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without the achievement by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly in 1974, namely, the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted.

The occupation of Palestinian land and the occupying Power's ultimate refusal to relinquish control over Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, further complicates efforts by the international community and the parties to the conflict — Israel and Palestine — to arrive at a just solution to the conflict, that is to say, the implementation of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

There have been encouraging developments once again this year, including a rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, that is in contrast to the continued pursuit of illegal policies by the occupying Power and by the upsurge in violence triggered by the never-ending circle of attacks and indiscriminate retaliation.

The passing of Yasser Arafat, the national leader of the Palestinians, over a year ago has put the Palestinian people and its institutions in a situation that is very difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, his passing was also the beginning of a peaceful, democratic and responsible transition that followed the holding of the free, transparent and fair election that brought Mr. Mahmoud Abbas to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority. Soon thereafter, the first summit meeting in years was held at Sharm el-Sheikh between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. The commitments made by the parties created new momentum towards the resumption of the political process.

Last September, the Committee welcomed Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank. That development should have led to the relaunching of negotiations within the framework of the roadmap, as well as the restart of the stalled political process. It should be noted, however, that, at this very moment, Israel remains in control of the borders of the Gaza Strip, including its territorial waters and air space. It also continues to control the movement of people and goods in the West Bank, thereby hampering any meaningful economic development on Palestinian territory, which it continues to occupy.

Moreover, the situation remains worrisome in the West Bank. This year, Israel has accelerated the expansion of its settlements in that part of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Ignoring international opinion, it has also continued to build the illegal wall in occupied Palestinian lands. The creation of new facts on the ground is accompanied by another complication, related to the announcement of plans to develop other settlements in the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem and around the Holy City. All those activities run counter to the obligations imposed on Israel by the road map and contravene international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

Recently, the Committee welcomed as an encouraging sign the international community's intensified efforts to relaunch the implementation of measures envisaged in the road map and to facilitate dialogue between the parties. International donors have pledged substantial sums to rebuild the Gaza Strip following the Israeli withdrawal. The European Union, for its part, has stated that it is prepared to provide a third-party presence at the Rafah terminal between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. We expect both parties to cooperate fully with the Quartet and with other parties of good will.

For its part, the United Nations must continue to shoulder its responsibility with regard to the question

of Palestine until that problem is resolved in all its aspects. Ultimately, the definitive solution — two States defined by the 1967 borders and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — will depend on the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

Our Committee — which is the only United Nations intergovernmental body devoted exclusively to the political aspects of the question of Palestine — will make every effort, in strict accordance with its mandate, to help the Palestinian people realize its rights and fulfil its aspiration to have its own independent and sovereign State. The Committee is resolved to continue to carry out the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly for the benefit of the Palestinian people. In that context, we will continue to work to raise the awareness of and mobilize international opinion until the question of Palestine is resolved in accordance with international legitimacy.

The firm will motivating us all to resolve the question of Palestine and the resolute engagement of the Quartet, other Governments, United Nations bodies, international institutions, intergovernmental bodies and civil society organizations and associations, not to mention the dedication of private individuals, should help to create the broad consensus without which it will be impossible to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. I here reaffirm the Committee's support for that noble cause. We are resolved to continue to work together with all Member States, international organizations and all actors of civil society.

I take the opportunity provided by this solemn meeting to express the Committee's deep gratitude to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, who has ceaselessly supported our activities and is working tirelessly to restart the peace process. His commitment to peace in Palestine and throughout the world is well known to everyone, and we are extremely grateful to him for it. I also thank the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council for their great interest in the Committee's work and for their engagement in the quest for solutions to the problems of the Middle East.

We very much appreciate the participation in this event of many Ambassadors in their capacity as Government representatives. The many messages received from various heads of State or Government of United Nations Member States have been a source of inspiration for us. For the Palestinian people, they have been a source of strength and valuable support in the fight to regain national independence and sovereignty.

It is also a pleasure for us to welcome the representatives of our traditional partners: the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, whose tireless support has never faltered. I wish to thank them for participating in this commemorative day and for their decisive contribution to the Committee's work.

Finally, I take this opportunity to express the Committee's appreciation to the dedicated personnel of the United Nations organizations, bodies, funds and programmes and the officials of the many civil society organizations and associations that help to improve the daily lives of the Palestinians in the occupied territory.

In conclusion, I appeal earnestly to all those present — representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society associations — to redouble their efforts with a view to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

Mr. Eliasson (President of the General Assembly): I am indeed honoured and grateful to have been invited to address this meeting as President of the General Assembly. We meet here today at the United Nations to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as we have done every year since the late 1970s, when the General Assembly decided to establish the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We continue to observe this day in order to support the Middle East peace process and to mobilize international assistance for the Palestinian people.

Last year, in its resolution 59/31, the General Assembly recalled the relevant Security Council resolutions and welcomed the affirmation by the Council of the vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. We also reaffirmed the permanent

responsibility of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law. I commend you, Mr. Chairman, for what you and your Committee have done to remind us of that solemn and serious responsibility.

Let me also take this opportunity to express appreciation to all Governments, regional organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and individuals for their untiring work and dedication aimed at achieving lasting peace and security in the Middle East and providing humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

As we all know, the period of the past 30 years has been troubling and difficult for the region and for its peoples. Political progress has been slow or even absent. Images and realities of violence and human suffering have dominated Palestinian-Israeli relations. Lack of trust has permeated that crucial relationship.

Against that sombre background, it is gratifying to note the progress made this year. The Palestinian people demonstrated their commitment to democracy during the presidential elections in January. The international community welcomed the Israeli withdrawal and the dismantlement of settlements in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank in the late summer. Last week, on 25 November, following an agreement by both sides on movement and access, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, formally reopened the Gaza Strip's border crossing with Egypt, giving the Palestinians control over one of their frontiers for the first time in their history. I think we all note the historic significance of that moment. An important step was thus taken to fulfil the vision of a future Palestinian State.

All those who made this possible through painstaking and complicated negotiations, with persistent efforts and tenacity, are to be commended. The parties are encouraged to continue their cooperation on outstanding issues relating to disengagement, supported, again, by the international community.

Palestinians and Israelis must now build on those achievements and strengthen the momentum towards the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The road map, supported by the Quartet, provides a solid basis for the continued work for peace. The international community must intensify its engagement in helping the parties to end a conflict that for far too long has tormented the region and its peoples. It is crucial that Palestinians and Israelis now cooperate to the fullest extent possible. Actions which could aggravate the situation and increase suspicions or mistrust must not be undertaken. Violence and acts of terror must cease. Hope and a sense of direction must be restored to the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

In the meantime, everything must be done to alleviate the daily plight of the Palestinian people. Access and mobility are crucial for dealing with unemployment and poverty. International assistance should focus on capacity-building programmes as part of a development strategy for a future Palestinian State.

Let us hope and be determined that, with the full backing of the United Nations and the world community, the peace process will be reactivated so that we can finally see an end to decades of Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and conflict. Both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples have had enough of despair and loss of life. They deserve a future of peace, security and good-neighbourly relations. Let us all intensify our efforts to make this happen. This is in the interests of the parties, in the interests of the region, and in the interests of international peace and security.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for his important statement, which is a source of inspiration and encouragement for the Committee.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Committee for the invitation to this year's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. For 30 years, the Committee has carried out its important work of promoting the Palestinian people's inalienable rights in supporting the search for peace in the Middle East. A solution to this decades-old conflict has proved elusive. Palestinians have yet to see the beginnings of the establishment of their own State. Israelis as well have yet to feel secure in their own State.

Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian success in ensuring calm during that period had raised hopes for a renewal of the political process. However, the ensuing upsurge in violence

seriously undermined the fledgling coordination between the parties, bringing back feelings of frustration and disappointment.

After the agreement two weeks ago to open the Rafah crossing, facilitate movement between Gaza and the West Bank, and reduce closures in the West Bank, a new opportunity has emerged to cooperate effectively and bring about tangible benefits in the lives of the Palestinian people, particularly among Palestinians who have suffered a serious economic decline and severe humanitarian problems due to the events of recent years.

I strongly urge the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships to work with each other, with Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn and with the Quartet itself to ensure that the agreement is implemented in full and on time. Again, action by the parties will complement the continued assistance provided by international donors to alleviate humanitarian suffering and boost the Palestinian economy.

Both Palestinians and Israelis will soon go to the polls in elections that will have an important bearing on the future of the peace process. The electoral season should not be allowed to prevent the parties from engaging in the essential work of building mutual trust and following through with the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings.

In addition, if disengagement is to be a springboard to progress on broader issues, it is vital that the parties give new impetus to meeting their obligations under the road map which they have accepted and which have been endorsed by the Security Council.

Palestinians need to be assured that the future viability of the Palestinian State will not be eroded by settlement expansion or by reconstruction. Israelis need to be assured that their security will not be compromised by failure to act decisively against terror.

I therefore reiterate the recent calls of the Quartet for renewed action in parallel by both parties to meet their obligations under the road map which encompass clearly specified action on security, Palestinian institution-building, humanitarian response, civil society and settlements.

Performance of road map obligations is the way to move forward towards the shared goal of a sovereign, continuous and democratic Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

For my part, I remain firmly committed to efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and the principle of land for peace.

Let us all work hard to help the Palestinian people exercise their inalienable rights and realize their aspirations to live in peace and prosperity in a sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his very wise statement, which reflects the resolve of the United Nations to continue its efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The Committee is particularly grateful to him for his constant concern for that question and for his pivotal role in the quest for peace and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis and among all the peoples of the region of the Middle East.

It is my pleasure now to give the floor to the President of the Security Council, Ambassador Andrey Denisov.

Mr. Denisov (Russian Federation), President of the Security Council (*spoke in Russian*): This year was marked by substantive steps aimed at ensuring progress in the Middle East peace process based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. One of these steps is the withdrawal by Israel from the Gaza Strip and from part of the West Bank of the Jordan River. This will enable progress, in accordance with the road map, towards the ultimate goal of two States living side by side in peace and security.

The Security Council unconditionally supports the work of the Quartet and advocates the continuation of the dialogue between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel. Of course, progress in this dialogue depends on a number of factors, notably on confidence-building measures on both sides. Effective actions have to be taken by the Palestinian Authority to halt terrorist activity in the territory under its control and to establish reliable law and order there. At the same time, we must stress the need for Israel to halt all forms of settlement expansion and to dismantle settlement outposts. Of course, the legitimate concerns

of the Israeli side with regard to ensuring its own security must be taken into account.

It should also be pointed out that without visible improvement in the everyday life of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, the degree of hope which exists now in the Palestinian lands may turn into disappointment, which extremist forces will not fail to exploit. In this context, ensuring freedom of movement of Palestinians and Palestinian goods, their relations with the outside world and clear observance by the parties of the principle of refraining from steps that might predetermine the outcome of the final status negotiations must promote movement forward along the path of a long-term political settlement.

In this connection, the Security Council welcomes the agreement on movement and access and the agreed principles for the Rafah crossing, reached between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority 15 November 2005, and calls on the parties to take immediate action to implement the terms of both agreements according to the timelines established therein. The Security Council fully supports the holding of free, fair and transparent Palestinian legislative elections next January.

In conclusion, I should like to say that the Security Council is united in the view that the international community must take concrete steps to ensure that extremists do not undo the positive changes in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. These changes must make it possible to resume the implementation of the provisions of the road map and to come closer to achieving the final goal, which is peace and security both for Israel and for an independent Palestinian State.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank the President of the Security Council, Mr. Andrey Denisov, for his important statement. It now gives me pleasure to call upon the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Mr. Riyadh Mansour, who will now read out a message from the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr. Mansour (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Palestine would like to extend its thanks to you, Mr. Chairman, and to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this yearly observance of the International Day of Solidarity With the Palestinian People. It gives me pleasure on this occasion to read to you a message by His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority. I quote:

> "We meet today with all the defenders of international legitimacy and of the principles of justice and peace to commemorate together the International Day of Solidarity With the Palestinian People and our national, inalienable rights to freedom and independence, and to reject the policies of injustice, domination and occupation. Annually, on this day, the Palestinian people receive a message from the world reaffirming to them that they are not alone in their struggle to achieve their legitimate rights, which are guaranteed by international legitimacy and are supported by all who represent the conscience of the world and believe in and defend those lofty principles and rights and insist on putting an end to the historic suffering and injustice that have befallen our Palestinian people.
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> "On this occasion, allow me to convey my gratitude and deep appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to Mr. Paul Badji and his respected colleagues, the members of the executive bureau, and to all the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the genuine efforts they have deployed to promote the realization by the Palestinian people of their rights.
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> "Our cause has gone through many difficulties and significant changes since the day in 1977 when the United Nations General Assembly designated 29 November the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Since then, the peace process was launched at the Madrid Conference, which led to the signing of the declaration of principles for the interim period and revived the hopes of our people and the peoples of the region in the establishment of peace and stability. During those years, the Palestinian people continued their just struggle to achieve freedom and independence, and all States rejecting occupation, oppression and persecution have stood with and supported the Palestinian people. These States have called

upon Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to its occupation and to respect the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State on the territory occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to find a just and agreed solution for the plight of the refugees based on resolution 194 (III).

"However, the peace process, despite the humble achievements realized at the start, has suffered repeated setbacks as a result of the Israeli occupation and its measures. Israel, under various pretexts and false excuses, refuses to implement the resolutions of international law and the road map and continues to deprive the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights.

"The construction of the wall of annexation and racial separation continues, despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice dated 9 July 2004, which declared the wall unlawful, and to which the international community responded with resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, condemning the wall and calling upon Israel to comply with its legal obligations as called for in the advisory opinion.

"In this same context, Israel has continued its policy of confiscating Palestinian land to build settlements. East Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, has become isolated from the rest of the Palestinian territories and surrounded by walls on all sides. Its geographic character and nature continue to be altered. Its institutions remain closed and the identity of its people continues to be denied under various pretexts. Israel also continues to detain thousands of Palestinian prisoners in its prisons.

"The peace process and the road map, welcomed by the entire international community and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003), as well as the final status negotiations, have all been under the control of the will of Israel, the occupying Power, and its expansionist plans, at the expense of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

"In addition to this, all types of oppression have been employed, including killings, assassinations, arrests, home demolitions, the uprooting of trees and the destruction of livelihoods and infrastructure. Other measures have included the imposition of closures and sieges on our cities, villages and camps. They have been transformed into isolated cantons and prisons for hundreds of thousands of people, in violation of international law and norms, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights laws.

"Under these circumstances, many significant developments have occurred, notably the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. This development took place after our late president, Yasser Arafat, planted the seeds of independence and freedom. It came as a result of our people's struggle and steadfastness, and also as a result of your continued support. Despite the unilateral nature of this move and our deep concern that it has been carried out while the colonization of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has expanded and intensified and has been accompanied by the imposition of unilateral decisions and the concept of a State with provisional borders, we have dealt with the situation in a positive manner. We have striven to transform the withdrawal from Gaza into an opportunity to return to the negotiating table and begin the resolution of all final status issues, based on the provisions of international law.

"The agreements signed on 15 November and the opening of the Rafah crossing have had an important impact on our people, for that crossing constitutes a link between the Gaza Strip and the Arab world, as well as a link to the world as a whole. It is also a first step towards unifying and joining the Palestinian territories as part of the journey towards the realization of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem at its heart.

"In this regard, I wish to express on behalf of our Palestinian people and their leadership our deep gratitude to all who have made efforts to conclude this agreement. In this context, the Palestinian National Authority has initiated before, during and after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza efforts aimed at maintaining public security and order and imposing the rule of law, in order to provide security for our citizens, improve their economic situation and encourage

investment. This is being done in addition to continuing efforts to enhance the democratic process. This began with the elections and will continue with the Palestinian Legislative Council elections on 25 January 2006, which aim at laying the foundations of political pluralism based on the rule of law.

"We in Palestine have chosen peace and negotiation as the way to reach a just and comprehensive peace and achieve our legitimate objectives of freedom, independence and self-determination in accordance with international law, the road map and the vision of President Bush. Our hands remain outstretched towards peace.

"The United Nations has played a central role in the life of the Palestinian people. Since its establishment, the United Nations has shouldered its responsibility with regard to this cause, and has been committed to the achievement of a just and comprehensive solution in all aspects. Over many years, the United Nations has made efforts to preserve and safeguard the rights of the Palestinian people and has always provided a legal and just basis for resolving the Palestinian issue. For this reason, I can only convey to this meeting our people's deep gratitude and appreciation for this historic and important role in affirming our legitimate national rights, particularly in the last few years. Today, the whole world stands together against injustice and occupation. This is proof that the conscience of the world is alive and aware of the tragedy of the people of Palestine that has deprived them of their right to freedom, independence and the establishment of their independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Peace cannot be achieved and freedom cannot see the light under occupation, domination and the denial of rights. May peace be upon you."

Here our president's message ends.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I ask Mr. Mansour to kindly convey our sincere thanks and greetings to the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and president of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. Please thank him warmly on our behalf for this very important message.

Through you on behalf of all of us I should like to extend to Mr. Abbas our feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle for self-determination, independence and national sovereignty. I should also like to assure Mr. Abbas, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people of our Committee's firm commitment to continue its efforts as mandated by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

Now, with everyone's permission, I should like to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests to leave the chamber. On behalf of the Committee, once again, I should like to express to them our deep gratitude for their presence and for the important messages that they have conveyed to us. The meeting is suspended.

The meeting was suspended at 12 noon and resumed at 12.05 p.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): We shall now continue our work, providing an opportunity for individuals to read out the messages that they have received.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mohd. Radzi Abdul Rahman, Alternate Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, who will read out a message on behalf of Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Mohd. Radzi (Malaysia): Today, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the pleasure to read out a message from the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The message reads as follows:

"On this solemn occasion observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am honoured to address this meeting in my capacity as Chairperson of the Special Committee established by the General Assembly to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories. On this day, we once again individually and collectively

express our steadfast solidarity with the people of Palestine.

"On this occasion, I wish to inform this meeting that, earlier this month, I introduced to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly the report of the Special Committee reflecting our findings and observations pertaining to the human rights situation in the occupied territories.

"Despite some positive developments in the aftermath of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit of February 2005 and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, the testimony given by witnesses to the Special Committee amply reflected the dire human rights situation in the occupied territories. Their accounts demonstrated the harshness of the military occupation and the ill effects of road closures and numerous checkpoints.

"Moreover, Jewish settlements isolating or cutting off Palestinian villages are negatively impacting all the human rights of the Palestinians. 'Ethnic cleansing' and 'rampant expulsions' were the words used by several Palestinian witnesses to describe their miserable situation. Once again, the Special Committee was not allowed by Israel to visit the occupied territories and assess first-hand the human rights situation in Palestine. This restriction also prevented any exchange of views with the relevant Israeli authorities.

"But the situation in Palestine, and indeed in the world, has changed since the inception of the Special Committee's mandate 37 years ago. A new generation of leaders is assuming leadership, and dialogue and cooperation are now preferred over monologue and confrontation. In this context, the Special Committee is of the view that Israel, after all these years of denying the Committee access to the occupied territories, should revisit the reasons behind that refusal.

"During our field mission from 25 June to 9 July 2005, the Special Committee visited Egypt, Jordan and Syria and met with, altogether, 38 witnesses from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In Syria, the Special Committee heard the testimony of eight witnesses with direct and personal knowledge of the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan.

"More than ever, the Special Committee is convinced that the construction of the separation wall is violating every single right of the Palestinians — not only with respect to freedom of movement, but also the rights related to adequate housing, food, social life, education and health. The wall is affecting the very national identity of the Palestinians and their legitimate claims to territories which not long ago were contiguous lands.

"As a result of the wall, Palestinians are losing control over a key strategic resource — namely, water — through the extensive destruction of groundwater wells and water pipes. Many rural communities are now forced to look for alternative water sources and often suffer from the ill effects of contaminated water and inadequate sewage and sanitation systems.

"The wall also affects the supply of energy. The combined effects of the wall, military incursions, the confiscation of land for settlers and route closures have prevented Palestinian electricity companies from maintaining a regular supply of power or from attending to the needs of customers located on the other side of the wall. Moreover, many Palestinians in Jerusalem are deprived of electricity because, it is alleged, their houses were illegally built.

"Women and children are still paying a heavy toll, owing to the persistent and harsh daily conditions affecting Palestinians as a whole. Rising unemployment, together with multifaceted restrictions on movement — including restrictions caused by the wall — have prevented Palestinians from gaining access to health facilities. Those restrictions have also generated food insecurity and a decline in nutritional levels. After the completion of the wall, it is expected that only 39 per cent of Palestinians will have access to health facilities and that as many as 120,000 children will be deprived of vaccinations.

"Health outreach programmes have been cut off in some areas as a result of the wall, and mobile clinics have been prevented from reaching their patients. Pregnant women are increasingly at risk, as they cannot easily access primary health-care dispensaries and are held back at

checkpoints on their way to hospital at the time of delivery.

"Several witnesses spoke of attacks against children on their way to school, as well as numerous impediments caused by closures, curfews and long waiting hours at checkpoints or entry points to the wall. This trend seems to indicate a growing and deliberate pattern by the occupying Power to hamper normal schooling, especially higher education. Most students are unable to enrol in or reach universities outside their locality and teachers are at times unable to reach the workplace regularly. Teachers and students have to cross checkpoints on foot, risking their safety. The quality of education is also suffering as teachers are often compelled to be recruited from the neighbourhood and are not necessarily the best qualified. In the Special Committee's view, inadequate education will hamper the development of skills and leadership among Palestinian youth in the coming years.

"The number of detainees is again on the rise, with up to 1,500 Palestinians reportedly detained in Israeli jails, including 110 to 170 women and 300 to 330 minors. Several hundred detainees are being held in administrative detention for indefinite renewable periods. Prisoners are allegedly subjected to degrading and cruel treatment, including torture. The situation of women was dire, according to several witnesses, and the condition of minors was no less appalling. Minors were subjected to various threats, such as destruction of their homes or life imprisonment, and were sometimes confined in isolated cells.

"In the occupied Syrian Golan, Israel has also tightened its grip on water resources. Landmines are still a threat to the population of the occupied Syrian Golan, as they are reportedly often laid close to villages and fields. The burying of Israeli nuclear waste allegedly continues in a tract of land close to the Syrian border in the vicinity of Jabal al-Sheikh summit. About half of the existing Jewish settlements are to be expanded, and citizens of the occupied Syrian Golan continue to be denied their traditional cultural practices.

"The Special Committee observed with dismay the ever-deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. It has not been possible to detect much trust among the witnesses on the prospect for peace, despite several positive developments in the region and some actions taken by Israeli authorities in that regard. The Committee sees it as crucial that Israel take measures to restore trust across communities, on the basis that the two-State solution of independent States of Israel and Palestine existing side by side will soon be a tangible reality and that, as a consequence, just aspirations of all communities will be met.

"The Special Committee sincerely hopes that the current developments and changes that are taking place in Israel will offer a window of opportunity to all parties concerned and will pave the way for a just and durable peace in the Middle East. The Special Committee, in that context, calls upon the Israeli authorities to show restraint and to take measures, in accordance with the obligations of the road map, that will contribute towards improving the human rights situation of the Palestinian people."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Mohd. Radzi Abdul Rahman for his important statement on behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, Mr. Hamidon Ali, who will read out a message from the Prime Minister of Malaysia, His Excellence Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): I have the honour to read out a message from The Honourable Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which we are commemorating today. The message reads as follows:

"On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour to extend, on behalf of Malaysia and the

Non-Aligned Movement, our warmest greetings to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, as well as to all of our Palestinian brothers and sisters, and to express our solidarity with them. We are commemorating this Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians, a day that continues to witness their continuing oppression and suffering under Israeli occupation.

"On this solemn occasion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its continued and unequivocal support for and longstanding solidarity with the Palestinian people and their leadership in their legitimate and courageous struggle and in their long-standing quest for the full realization of their inalienable rights, to become masters of their own destiny and to live freely in their own sovereign and independent State of Palestine, within secure and recognized borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"Yet, as we observe this International Day of Solidarity, we continue to witness violence, death and suffering inflicted upon the Palestinian people by Israel, the occupying Power. We remain firm in our condemnation of the harsh policies and practices of Israel, as well as of the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israel against the Palestinian people, the destruction of Palestinian homes and property and restriction of the freedom of movement of people in the occupied Palestinian territory. We urge Israel to reverse the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and socio-economic condition in the occupied Palestinian territory. We stress that there must be greater commitment and sincerity in the move towards peace.

"The Movement continues to be concerned at the lack of real progress in the implementation of the road map more than two years since its adoption. We take note, however, of the recent agreement brokered by the United States to provide access at the border between Gaza and Egypt. We call for its full implementation as quickly as possible.

"We urge the United States to sustain the momentum of securing full freedom for Gaza as part of the steps in finding a permanent solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While we welcome Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, the Movement insists that the measure should be seen as part of the road map, not outside of it, and that it should be quickly followed by similar steps in the West Bank.

"We would also like to urge the Palestinian leadership to seize the opportunity to build upon the advances made thus far and work to secure more progress in finding solutions to the question of Palestine.

"Clearly, there is an urgent need for the international community, in particular the Quartet, to work towards ensuring the early and full implementation of the road map with earnestness and sincerity. It is imperative that renewed efforts by the Quartet to salvage the road map be further strengthened in order to ensure its early and full implementation. The Movement remains convinced that the Quartet can and will fulfil its role and responsibility in this regard. Concrete steps towards peace are important in order to give the Palestinian people hope for the future, lest they succumb to despair and despondency, with all its negative ramifications.

"The continued construction by Israel of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory has only contributed to further exacerbating the peace process, undermining and destroying the very foundations of political dialogue between the two sides that had been painstakingly laid down by the Quartet. In spite of the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice in July 2004, Israel continues to construct the wall and expand its settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and continues the systematic seizure of large tracts of Palestinian lands and housing in East Jerusalem.

"These provocative actions are certainly not conducive to the peace process and have raised questions about Israel's real intentions. The Non-Aligned Movement urges all Member States, in particular Israel, to take all measures necessary to ensure compliance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15.

"The international community cannot deny that any further deterioration of the situation in

the occupied Palestinian territory would be detrimental to the cause of peace in the entire region. The international community must lend its support in order to mend the situation, which is imbued with mistrust and antipathy. Now is the time to act.

"The Israeli Government cannot continue to ignore the agreements, accords and understandings arrived at by the two sides or by the internationally recognized mediators. Israel must abandon terror tactics in favour of constructive dialogue and engagement with the Palestinians. Clearly, the international community must do more to manifest its support for a just resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"The international community has a collective role to play in finding a solution to the Palestinian question. We must all work together to facilitate the attainment of peace in the region. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Malaysia, as its Chairman, have launched several initiatives in our continuing efforts concerning the question of Palestine. They include the holding of an annual ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement Committee on Palestine in New York last September and meetings between the Non-Aligned Movement ministerial delegation on Palestine and members of the Quartet and permanent members of the Security Council.

"In addition, mindful of the need to promote a people-based global campaign involving civil society in support of Palestine, Malaysian civil society organizations, under the sponsorship of Peace Malaysia, successfully organized the World Civil Society Conference entitled 'Peace in Palestine' in Putrajaya in March 2005, which was attended by representatives of civil society organizations from many parts of the world, including Israel. The Conference agreed, inter alia, to establish an international centre on Palestine for civil society in the South, which is to be located in Malaysia and serve as the focal point for the global civil society campaign in support of Palestine. It is our hope that the international campaign will be able to mobilize international public opinion against the continued Israeli occupation and in support of the early realization of a sovereign State of Palestine.

"Finally, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and in Malaysia's capacity as its Chairman, I would like to reaffirm, on this very important day, our firm commitment to ensuring that a just, comprehensive and lasting peaceful settlement is achieved on the question of Palestine in all its aspects. Rest assured that the Non-Aligned Movement will strongly support all initiatives and efforts to address the Palestinian question, which has been high on the Movement's agenda at all times. The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to cooperate with the international community towards that end. The United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, must remain seized of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in its entirety, on the basis of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law. We look forward to the day when the international community soon joins the Palestinians in celebrating their independence and statehood."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mohd. Radzi for his statement and ask him to convey to Mr. Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, our respectful feelings of gratitude for that important message. We are very grateful to Malaysia for the many initiatives that it has taken, in various capacities, for the Palestinian people and for the continuation of the activities of the Committee.

I now give the floor to Mr. Abdullah Alsaidi, the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations, who will read a statement from Mr. Abubakr Al-Qirbi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the thirty-second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall make a statement on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Today, we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Palestinian people yearn to attain their freedom and exercise their right to self-determination, as do all other peoples in the world.

On this occasion, allow me to extend the solidarity of the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the Palestinian people in their

legitimate struggle for the establishment of an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and for the return of displaced Palestinians to their homes and properties.

The meeting today is an affirmation of our support for justice and international law. This year, the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes place against an encouraging backdrop for the establishment of the Palestinian State. The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip is one of the fruits of the struggle of the Palestinian people and of the international community's support for the Palestinians in their legitimate struggle to attain independence.

However, although Israel has evacuated its colonialist settlements in the Gaza Strip, it continues to tighten its grip on the Gaza Strip. It continues to control Palestinian seaports and the airspace of the Gaza Strip. It also continues to expand its settlements in the West Bank, with a view to absorbing the settlers exiting the settlements in the Gaza Strip and to creating political facts on the ground that will complicate the final status negotiations.

In that regard, we express our grave concern at the actions taken by Israel in East Jerusalem, which would lead to the isolation of the Holy City from the rest of the Palestinian territories. Surrounding the Holy City with settlements will also lead to the dismemberment of the West Bank, making the dream of a viable Palestine State no more than a mirage, unless the international community compels Israel to comply with the provisions of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice concerning the expansionist wall.

We also express our grave concern at the plans of Israeli extremists concerning Al-Quds Al-Sharif and, in particular, the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Encroachment on the Islamic holy sites will not contribute to peace or stability for the parties concerned. We look to the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as the international community as a whole, to fulfil their responsibilities in supporting the Palestinian National Authority and enabling it to rebuild the infrastructure destroyed by Israel and in putting an end to the blockade of the Palestinian territories and stopping the construction of the expansionist wall, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

In that regard, we would like to reaffirm the vital importance of full compliance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for Israel's withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967. We reaffirm the vital importance of respect for subsequent agreements and initiatives, including the Arab peace initiative and the road map, both of which provide for the establishment of the Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks and gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, for your distinct role and for that played by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. It is our hope that the Committee will continue to discharge its noble task of sensitizing the international community to the grave injustice that has befallen the Palestinian people, who have lost their land to occupation and have been displaced from their homes.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Alsaidi for his important message on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, Mr. Aminu Bashir Wali, who will read a message addressed to the Committee from the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, in his capacity as Chairman of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

Mr. Wali (Nigeria): On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour to convey the following message from Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of Nigeria and current Chairman of the African Union.

> "As we observe today the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I express, on behalf of the African Union, our warmest greetings to Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, as well as our solidarity with the Palestinian people.
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> "It is equally fitting, on this auspicious occasion, that we recall the first anniversary of the demise of the great leader of the Palestinian

people, the late Chairman Yasser Arafat, who devoted his entire life to the pursuit of freedom and dignity for the Palestinian people, a goal that has remained the focus of the efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since its establishment under General Assembly resolution 3376 (XXX) of 1975.

"Since the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was established in 1977, Africa has joined others in the international community to reaffirm, year after year, the right of the Palestinian people to dignity and respect, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Africa has exhibited unwavering support for the Palestinian cause because of our conviction that the Palestinian people, like all peoples, deserve to be accorded the internationally recognized right to freedom and dignity.

"Africa has therefore followed developments in the Middle East process with keen interest. We consider the present plight of the Palestinian people not only a reminder of failed opportunities but also a challenge to members of the Organization to translate that vision into reality.

"The significant milestones that we have attained on this matter over the years are cause for satisfaction but should not make us complacent. The international community should not let slip the propitious opportunity to advance the cause of peace, development and security in the region that now presents itself. The situation in the Middle East continues to require the best of concerted efforts from the international community, in particular from the countries of the region. Peace can be achieved only through accommodation and mature recognition. We all have a responsibility to encourage the parties to the conflict to cultivate good-neighbourliness, so that, in a spirit of give and take, the best interests of the peoples of the region can be served.

"Africa reaffirms its long-held conviction that the Palestinian issue cannot be resolved by military or violent means. Violence begets violence, leaving in its wake death and destruction, sorrow and bitterness, recriminations and vengeance. The result, as has been too painfully evident, is an environment that is even further removed from peace.

"The African Union therefore welcomes the recent efforts to broker peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and commends the restoration of trust and confidence between the two leaderships. Indeed, Africa welcomes the understanding elaborated in the Sharm el-Sheikh document, which, inter alia, calls for the cessation of violence, as a major milestone in the efforts to address the plight of the Palestinian people, as well as the peaceful implementation of the road map.

"In the same vein, Africa considers the recent removal of Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank, as well as the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the opening of the Rafah border crossing by the President of the Palestinian Authority, to be helpful signs of peace. Those specific steps should serve to galvanize action by the parties in particular and the international community in general towards a lasting solution that brings peace to the region as a whole.

"Mindful of the fact that the Charter of the United Nations confers the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security on the Security Council, the African Union reiterates its support for the implementation of the Council's existing resolutions and the Quartet's road map.

"Africa also reaffirms its support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people. The acceptance and the realization of the vision of two States, living side by side within secure and defined borders, should strengthen peace and security in the region and permit the Palestinian people to finally enjoy the rights that many of us take for granted.

"Next year, our commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People should be a celebration of the achievement of Palestinian nationhood."

The Chairman *(spoke in French)*: I thank Mr. Aminu Bashir Wali for that important message on behalf of Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairman of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union. I request Mr. Wali to convey to President Obasanjo our sentiments of respect and gratitude for that important message, which well reflects Africa's support for the cause of the Palestinian people.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will read a message from Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to convey the sincere regards and appreciation of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to the Chairman of the Special Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and all its members, as well as to all those participating in the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

> "I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance that the League of Arab States attaches to the important role played by the Committee in supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in international and regional forums.
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> "I would also like to reaffirm our commitment to continuing to support that role until the Palestinian people can achieve their aspiration of establishing an independent State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and until they regain their full, undiminished rights in the face of the pressure exerted by the Israeli Government to terminate the work of this Committee and other United Nations committees concerned with Palestinian issues.
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> "This commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is taking place following the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and certain settlements in the northern West Bank. Although we have recognized the withdrawal as a positive step on the right path, we hoped it would represent the start of a new era that would lead to an active political engagement aimed at the realization of peace and a full withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories.
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> "However, what we see on the ground in terms of practice, in particular with regard to the expansion of the Israeli settlements, the construction of the separation wall and the judaization of Jerusalem, is not encouraging. We also note Israel's continued control over the airspace and territorial waters of the Gaza Strip, the successive acts by the Israeli Air Force aimed at the assassination of Palestinian cadres and the terrorization of peaceful civilians, in addition to the complete disregard of the human rights of Palestinian detainees and prisoners. All these practices have led to receding hopes and increased fears.
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> "We must also recall the important declaration by Mr. James Wolfensohn, the envoy of the Quartet, who has been supervising the Israeli withdrawal and the revitalization of the Palestinian economy since last October, in which he stated that Israel still acts as if it had not withdrawn from Gaza and still defers all necessary decisions.
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> "These acts and the lack of decisions have become clear, especially with regard to the problem of the checkpoints. As we have seen, a solution was reached only after tireless efforts and negotiations with Egypt and other Arab States, including the direct involvement of the United States and the European Union.
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> "The League of Arab States reiterates that the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip should be followed by additional steps, in order to achieve the progress required and create a favourable environment for the implementation of the obligations stipulated in the Sharm el-Sheik understandings. That would lead to the full implementation of all of the road map requirements. However, almost a full year has passed and Israel has not fulfilled all the steps under the timetable that was adopted when those understandings were agreed to.
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> "Therefore, we believe there is a definite need for serious international supervision through specific mechanisms, in order to achieve the desired settlement based on a clear peaceful foundation.

"The Palestinian people have suffered from all of the Israeli practices in violation of basic human rights, in clear violation of international humanitarian law and the international obligations and responsibilities of an occupying Power. Aggression against and invasions of towns and villages of the Palestinian people, in addition to extrajudicial killings and collective punishment imposed by the occupation of the Palestinian territories, in particular their siege and closure for extended periods of time, further aggravate the situation, in spite of the fact that the Palestinian National Authority has made every effort towards reform in all areas.

"The League of Arab States — which, at its 1996 Summit in Cairo, considered a just peace as a strategic option — also adopted the Arab Peace Initiative at the Beirut Summit in 2002 as a historic initiative, in which the Arab States declared their readiness to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They also showed their commitment to the realization of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, if Israel completely withdraws from the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967 and if an independent Palestinian State is established, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the issue of the Palestinian refugees is reached, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Only then would the Arab States be ready to establish normal relations with Israel based on justice, mutual respect and equity.

"Today the League of Arab States is ready to do its utmost to support the Palestinian National Authority in preparing the grounds for returning the peace process to its rightful track, within the framework of international legitimacy regarding the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"We would also like to express our commitment to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly with regard to the illegitimacy of the separation wall and the necessity to halt construction work on it and to remove what has already been built.

"Finally, we find it necessary to remind the international community that a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine can only be achieved when a viable independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is established. That is a fundamental condition for peace, security and stability in this important region of the world. Therefore, we call upon the international community, as represented in the United Nations and other concerned international bodies — foremost of which is the Quartet — to increase their efforts and to take responsibility for preparing the groundwork to give momentum to the peace process in the region, and to support the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to restore the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, as a basic guarantee for the establishment of stability in a region that has long suffered from the effects of war and injustice."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mahmassani and I would request him to convey to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Amre Moussa, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important statement.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr. Chris Doyle, Director of the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding. I am particularly pleased to be able to give the floor to Mr. Doyle, who will be making a statement on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine, an international network of civil-society organizations supporting the work of the Committee.

Mr. Doyle (International Coordinating Network on Palestine): On behalf of the International Coordinating Network of non-governmental organizations on Palestine, I would like to convey our deepest thanks and appreciation both to the General Assembly and to the Committee for their continued support on the question of Palestine and for continuing to mark this issue every year.

Today we are gathered here to mark the day when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine, back in 1947. It is a sad tragedy that, 58 years later, the consequences of partition continue to be ongoing conflict, exile and occupation, and we still have one State missing. The conflict has cost many people so much. In the end, there will never be a winner, only losers and degrees of losing, unless there is a viable peace process.

Throughout the world's global society there has been huge and massive interest and concern over the fate of the Palestinian people and the Middle East peace process, or, to put it more accurately, the lack of that peace. There must be more focus on peace, rather than just on process. That is a vital requirement, not just for Israelis and Palestinians, but for the entire region. A conflict that has lasted over 100 years needs closure. Israelis and Palestinians alike need security. Israelis have their State; Palestinians need theirs. In that regard, we welcome the commitment of President Bush to that outcome, as reiterated in the statements of the Quartet, but it needs all the members of the Quartet to be fully engaged. For that reason, it is welcome to see the European Union involved in the Rafah crossing agreement, but we would also like to see greater involvement of the United Nations in bringing about that viable State of Palestine. It must not be long in coming. There is a fear that it will be bogged down in temporary, interim phases or a State with provisional borders. It makes no sense to have two States in the region with undefined borders.

A Palestinian State is essential and essential now, but it must not be just any State. Palestinians needs a sovereign, viable State — one to be proud of — based on the 1967 borders, a mere 22 per cent of what was once their country. Only that will enable any agreement to gain acceptance amongst the majority of the Palestinian people.

That requires the complete, total and final end of the 38-year-old military occupation. A people who remain under occupation will inevitably resist and will fight the occupation, as history shows us very clearly. That, however, never excuses attacks on innocent Israeli civilians, but ending the terror of occupation will save many more lives than will walls, assassinations, home demolitions and the like.

We also welcome the evacuation of settlements from the Gaza Strip and of four settlements in the West Bank. Palestinians are now in control inside the Gaza Strip. The freedom to move from one end of the Strip to the other and the return of Palestinian land to its rightful owners are welcome. However, that is not a requirement just for Gaza, but also for East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The latest border-style terminals at Bethlehem, Qalandia and up to five other locations in the West Bank are yet more attempts to create facts on the ground that will only undermine confidence in any peace process in the future.

Gaza and the West Bank have to be truly free — by land, air and sea. Checkpoints have left the inside of the Gaza Strip; they now need to leave the inside of the West Bank. We have welcomed the end of the colonization in Gaza, we want to see the end of colonization as well in the West Bank.

The Israeli Government has taken much credit for the evacuation, but sadly, we non-governmental organizations have seen a net increase in the Israeli settler population and in the land area used by settlements and related infrastructure. So far this year, there have been an additional 11,000 settlers added to the 400,000 illegal settlers in the occupied territories — a rate of 1,000 additional settlers a month.

The Israeli Government has now demonstrated that settlements, even those in the West Bank, can be evacuated. There is no excuse to stop now from evacuating other settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Indeed, it must never be Gaza first and last.

The building of the wall inside the West Bank continues in clear and open defiance of the United Nations and the international community. In failing to adhere to both the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 and the subsequent General Assembly resolution, regrettably the Israeli Government stands once again in breach of international law. There is a clear duty to take action to reverse that destructive process.

The wall, once completed, will be twice the length of the Green Line, severing Palestinian communities from each other, their land, their water and their resources. Concern is also now mounting about the eastern part of the wall in the Jordan Valley. Action must include penalizing those companies that collude in the construction of the wall when it is in occupied territory.

Israeli activities in Jerusalem are also a major source of concern. The recent European Union report on Israeli activity exposes the seriousness of the threat to a two-State solution. Roughly 35 to 40 per cent of the Palestinian economy relies on East Jerusalem. Therefore, donor funds could once again be wasted unless action is taken. They may serve only to prop up an occupation instead of ending it, unless East Jerusalem is opened up once again for Palestinians.

All in all, once one includes the wall, the settlements, the roads and the military camps, effectively only 54 per cent of the West Bank currently remains for Palestinian usage. Before our eyes, openly, the two-State solution is being imprisoned in a grave not only of concrete and barbed wire, but also of hatred, anger and mistrust.

The other ingredient of full and lasting peace is, without question, human rights. That is universal and essential. Torture, house demolitions, the confiscation of land, assassinations and detentions without trial all serve only to exacerbate the situation. The levels of violence remain too high. Some think there has been relative calm, but that is news to the families of the 204 Palestinians and 36 Israelis killed so far this year.

Economic regeneration is vital, which is why the progress of the Gaza-Egypt border is so welcome. To be able to enter and exit at will is a key sovereign right which we also hope will be afforded to Palestinians in the West Bank before long. We also hope that safe passage to the airport and the port will be opened as soon as possible.

But the situation remains very severe. According to the World Bank, around half of the West Bank's population of Palestinians and nearly 70 per cent of the Gaza Strip's live well below the poverty line.

We would like to endorse the Secretary-General's recent call of 16 November 2005 for donors not only to continue their support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, but to increase it. The Agency now has the onerous task of catering to the needs of 4.2 million Palestinian refugees. The rights of refugees, of course, remain another key concern of civil society organizations around the world. They must not be forgotten.

Non-governmental organizations also look to the United Nations and its Members as the upholders of international law, without discrimination. We hope that Members will take that very seriously and see that upholding law is in the interests of all peoples and all parties.

But right now, Israel is defying this institution. It is waving its fist at the United Nations, in effect boasting to the world that it can get away with anything and that it has a teflon status. That era must come to an end. Nobody and no State should be above international law and allowed to mock the United Nations. Standing up for the rule of law is not being anti-Israel; it is being pro-peace.

Civil society organizations have been active on numerous fronts. At this year's annual United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Middle East Peace in Paris, there was a clear emphasis from non-governmental organizations on boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns. The aim is simple and clear: to persuade Israel to abide by international law and to end the occupation — nothing more, but definitely nothing less.

Over the next few months, we shall no doubt witness in both the Palestinian and Israeli elections possible changes in Governments and parliaments. The Palestinian elections are particularly welcome, but they must be free and fair, and that includes freedom of movement for candidates and voters alike.

None of that, however, will alter the essential principles necessary for the full and final resolution of the conflict — a viable two-State solution with security for all, based on Security Council resolutions and international law. We want peace in Palestine, not Palestine in pieces.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Doyle for his important statement and, above all, for his presence and his ongoing cooperation with the Committee.

It is my honour to announce that our Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, ministers for foreign affairs, Governments and international organizations. I recall that, in keeping with past practice, the texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of those who sent them.

We have received messages from the heads of State of Afghanistan, Algeria, Brazil, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Namibia, Pakistan, Qatar, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

We have also received messages from the heads of Government of Bangladesh, China, India, Mali and Thailand; from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Japan, Romania, the

Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine; and from the Government of Madagascar.

The Committee has also received messages from the European Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our appreciation to the heads of State or Government, ministers for foreign affairs, Governments and organizations that I have just mentioned, and to all the Governments, heads of State and ministers who may send messages in the days to come. I also thank all participants in today's meeting for their persistent efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question, and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of this Committee.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received show once again the unwavering support of the international community for the renewal of peace in the Middle East and for the Palestinian people's realization of its inalienable rights on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure participants that all the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort to ensure that those goals are achieved.

I now give the floor to Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): A few minutes ago, we heard the message of President Mahmoud Abbas addressed to this official meeting. We will all participate this afternoon in the General Assembly's important debate on the question of Palestine, so I will confine myself, in my personal capacity as a friend of yours, Sir, and of many of our colleagues here, as well as in my official capacity, to thanking you, the members of the Committee, and all the ambassadors and colleagues who have tirelessly supported and assisted our just cause. I also invite them to continue to provide such support and assistance. I hope that, when we meet next year, we will be closer to achieving the national independence and sovereignty of our State, Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Al-Kidwa for his important message and for joining us today. We eagerly look forward to receiving first-hand information from him this afternoon on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. I would ask him to convey to President Abbas and Prime Minister Qurei our expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle to realize its legitimate aspirations to self-determination and national independence.

I also wish to assure the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people of our Committee's firm resolve to pursue its mandated efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank everyone who made this meeting possible, in particular the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, the Office of Central Support Services, the interpreters, the translators, the authors of the press releases and all those working in the conference rooms for their dedication and high-quality services.

I should also like to remind participants that a Palestinian dance performance, to be presented under the auspices of the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will take place tonight at 7.30 p.m. in conference room 4. The El-Funoun dance troop will perform "Dancing Tragedies and Dreams". The event will be preceded by a reception to which everyone is invited.

Following this meeting, a film entitled *Route 181* will be screened in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library auditorium at 1 p.m. All are invited to attend the screening. The first part of the film will be shown today; the second and third parts will be shown tomorrow and on 1 December, respectively.

Once again, I thank everyone for their participation.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.